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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2961

INFO RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE

RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1614

RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 4869

RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 4898

RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 7860

RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 2748

RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 5559

RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 9510

RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 7993

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3142

RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 3351

RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 3240

RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI 3498

RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE 2459

RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 2514

RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR 3116

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC

RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0335

RHMFIS/HQ USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL

RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2591

RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI

RHMFIS/HQ USSOCOM MACDILL AFB FL

RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NEW DELHI 002789

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/25/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [KDEM](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: JAMMU & KASHMIR ASSEMBLY BY-ELECTIONS EXCEED
EXPECTATIONS

REF: A. 2004 NEW DELHI 2410

[1](#)B. NEW DELHI 2365

[1](#)C. 2004 NEW DELHI 2351

[1](#)D. 2002 NEW DELHI 5330

[1](#)E. 2002 NEW DELHI 5509

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Classified By: PolCouns Geoff Pyatt for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Residents of four of Jammu & Kashmir's Assembly constituencies came out in strength to vote in by-elections on April 24, undaunted by threats and violence in the third major exercise of electoral democracy in the state since 2002. Another data point in the trend of Kashmiris' growing efforts to secure normalcy and prosperity, the highest voter turnout in 16 years--estimated at around 60 percent--indicates that residents were not intimidated by pre-poll threats from terrorists, nor were they deterred by separatists' call for an election boycott. Notably, locals attributed the limited violence that did take place to "election criminality," rather than terrorism. Local press reports and Embassy observers commented that voters were motivated by local issues, such as education and development, rather than broader questions such as the India-Pakistan relationship. End Summary.

High Voter Turnout Reflects Electoral Excitement

[1](#)2. (SBU) Indian press outlets are reporting that voters

largely ignored a call by separatists to boycott the polls for the four Jammu & Kashmir Assembly seats being contested on April 24. Total turnout reached about 60 percent -- well above the 35 percent turnout for Lok Sabha elections in 2004 and the 42 percent turnout for Legislative Assembly elections in 2002 (REF A) -- confirming the sense of excitement that Poloff and Pol FSN observed during their visits to 11 polling stations. On April 25, Jammu & Kashmir's Chief Electoral Officer announced the following turnout figures for each of the constituencies: Bhaderwah - 72 percent; Rafiabad - 66.2 percent; Pattan - 56.2 percent; Sangrama - 40.3 percent. Despite a slow start at some polling places, Poloff and Pol FSN witnessed queues several hundred people deep at several locations by the afternoon. Extrapolating out their observations, the government's overall turnout figure is consistent with what Poloff and Pol FSN saw. As they traveled, Poloff and Pol FSN were greeted by voters proudly holding up their inked fingers to show that they had exercised their franchise. At one polling station in Sangrama, Poloff noted that a group of about 50 stood without blocking the voting booths, and said within range of the security forces that they were boycotting the election. The only note-worthy impact of the separatists' boycott call appeared to be the large-scale shuttering of shops near Sopore and the more limited number of closed stores in Pattan; it was business as usual in most other places, again in contrast to the 2004 elections.

Importance of Local Issues Outweighs Boycott Calls

13. (C) Voters told Poloff and Pol FSN that they were voting based on local issues, including education and development, rather than on the basis of Indo-Pakistani relations, on which separatist leaders have focused (REF B). Press reports

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corroborated comments made to Poloff and Pol FSN, that voters were seemingly more interested in the candidate's local platform than that of the party. The number of voters who decided to flout the boycott call stands in stark contrast to the Kashmiri response to a similar call during the 2004 Lok Sabha elections, in which Embassy observers noted that many voters were government employees (REF C).

Political Intimidation Tactics, Not Terrorism

14. (SBU) Although initial press reports attributed grenade attacks at two polling places to militants, Poloff and Pol FSN were told that activists affiliated with the People's Democratic Party (PDP) were behind the violence. According to Indian press reports on April 25, voters captured and held alleged PDP workers accused of the attack following a mid-morning grenade explosion that injured five at a polling station in Palhalan village in Pattan. Similarly, at a polling station in Wagoora in Sangrama, voters staged an apparently impromptu demonstration against the PDP in response to a grenade attack there that injured 18. Poloff and Pol FSN were told that after the Palhalan attack, a local Maulvi used a loudspeaker to broadcast a call for voters to cast ballots in favor of the National Conference. Indian newspapers also reported on April 25 that National Conference candidate and former minister Mustafa Kamaal publicly blamed a PDP candidate for orchestrating the attacks. Poloff and Pol FSN saw posters allegedly put up by the Hizbul Mujahideen that warned people not to vote; however, separatist leader Yasin Malik and Yusuf Jamil of the Asian Age told us that HM has denied posting the fliers, and the political parties are assigning guilt to each other, calling the posters part of a political strategy (Note: We will report on the mechanics and results of the elections, as well as alleged political maneuverings, septel. End Note.).

Also Noteworthy: Low Level of Violence

¶5. (C) Despite expectations to the contrary, the Assembly elections were largely peaceful, particularly in contrast to the 2002 Assembly elections and the 2004 Lok Sabha elections (REF C, D and E). Poloff and Pol FSN observed that both voters and the small number of boycotters were free to make their respective statements. Press noted that separatists Shabir Shah and APHC hardliner Geelani had been placed under house arrest, possibly dampening violence around the elections; however, attacks took place in 2002 and 2004, even though the government had preemptively detained separatists then, as well.

Comment: Voters Speak: Ballots Beat Violence

¶6. (C) The key indicator of a credible election, voter turnout, underscored a solid electoral exercise for J&K. The percentage of ballots cast, combined with the apparent absence of terrorist violence, makes this election more like those in the rest of India. The GOI will likely cite this development as further evidence of normalization in this tense territory when Kashmiri leaders meet the Prime Minister for the next "round table" exercise. In the meantime, the observations of our officers in the Valley provide further

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evidence for the judgment that Kashmiris are turning their backs once and for all on militancy with a view to pursuing their interests through the mechanisms of Indian democracy.

¶7. (U) Visit New Delhi's Classified Website:
(<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/sa/newdelhi/>)
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